

# **COMPREHENSION**

## GOING FORWARD

# COMPREHENSION GOING FORWARD

where we are / what's next ►

ELLIN OLIVER KEENE / SUSAN ZIMMERMANN / DEBBIE MILLER /

SAMANTHA BENNETT / LESLIE BLAUMAN / CHRYSE HUTCHINS /

STEPHANIE HARVEY / ANNE GOUDVIS / BRAD BUHROW /

GINA CERVETTI / MARJORIE LARNER / CRIS TOVANI /

NANCY COMMINS / ANNE UPCZAK GARCIA / TANNY MCGREGOR /

CODA BY **P. DAVID PEARSON** / HARVEY "SMOKEY" DANIELS, EDITOR



HEINEMANN  
Portsmouth, NH

## Chapter 1



**ELLIN OLIVER KEENE**

*Ellin Oliver Keene*

*"Children want to understand—they're hardwired to understand—and they love to be surprised and challenged by the depth and quality of their own and others' insights."*

---

## Chapter 2



**SUSAN ZIMMERMANN**

*Susan Zimmermann*

*"Somehow, in our effort to make sure no child is left behind (or that no child is left untested!) we have forgotten that we need to teach children to be thinkers and problem solvers."*

---

## Chapter 3



**DEBBIE MILLER**

*Debbie Miller*

*"Here's the thing. We can have the best lessons in the world, but if our comprehension instruction ends here—with the lesson—we're missing the point."*

---

## Chapter 4



**SAMANTHA BENNETT**

*S. Bennett*

*"Comprehension strategies do not live in a box, to be doled out to students one at a time. They are the way we make meaning of the world throughout our days of living and learning together."*

---

## Chapter 5



**LESLIE BLAUMAN**

*Leslie Blauman*

*"Think about the power we are giving our students when we teach them how to notice their thinking and then to discuss it.... Merely having students discuss—without scaffolding deep, rich talk—isn't enough."*

---

## Chapter 6



**CHRYSE HUTCHINS**

*Chryse Hutchins*

*"If our goal is to create readers who know what to do with words, having access to other readers is crucial."*

---

## Chapter 7



**STEPHANIE HARVEY**

*Stephanie Harvey*

*"Teaching kids to think strategically and ask questions ranks at the top of our list of responsibilities in the twenty-first century."*

## Chapter 8



**ANNE GOUDVIS AND BRAD BUHROW**

*Anne Goudvis*

*Brad Buhrow*

*"Teaching historical literacy means we merge thoughtful, foundational literacy practices with challenging, engaging resources to immerse kids in historical ways of thinking."*

## Chapter 9



**GINA CERVETTI**

*Gina Cervetti*

*"While students are being exposed to more science content in basal texts, it appears that little attention is being paid to the development of science knowledge or to the reading practices of science."*

## Chapter 10



**MARJORIE LARNER**

*Marjorie Larner*

*"In an era when many educators are expected to accept prescribed curricula, data-driven instruction, and increasingly lean budgets, it is doubly important to focus on thinking that matters to our students' development as human beings and citizens."*

## Chapter 11



**CRIS TOVANI**

*Cris Tovani*

*"Strategies breed independence because they give readers a way to interact with the words and ideas on the page rather than passively absorbing them.... Different text structures require readers to have different conversations. Strategies make those conversations possible."*

## Chapter 12



**NANCY COMMINS**

*Nancy Commins*

*"Comprehension is not about the text itself—the words on the paper or screen—but more importantly how students are given access to the ideas represented in the print."*

## Chapter 13



**ANNE UPCZAK GARCIA**

*Anne Upczak Garcia*

*"From the first day a child walks through the door until they are finally considered a fluent bilingual child, we focus on going in-depth into content and language to make sure children develop solid understandings about every subject we study."*

---

## Chapter 14



**TANNY MCGREGOR**

*Tanny McGregor*

*"Comprehension is about fascinating thinking, derived from reading, writing, talking, and (just as any musician will tell you) a whole lot of practice."*

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## Coda



**P. DAVID PEARSON**

*P. David Pearson*

*"The real genius of this book is that it is written by teachers, for teachers. All of the authors know what classrooms are like—either because they teach in classrooms every day or because they spend a lot of time working with teachers in classrooms and in professional development settings."*

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## Editor



**HARVEY "SMOKEY" DANIELS**

*Harvey "Smokey" Daniels*

*"Our whole lives unfold through our growing ability to make sense as we listen, view, and eventually read. There is no topic more important to human development—or to education—than learning how we humans come to understand."*

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Welcome and Introduction: **HARVEY “SMOKEY” DANIELS**, EDITOR 1

## MONITORING OUR COMPREHENSION

---

*Chapter 1* **ELLIN OLIVER KEENE**, CONSULTANT  
*Comprehension Instruction Grows Up* 9

*Chapter 2* **SUSAN ZIMMERMANN**, AUTHOR AND EDUCATION CONSULTANT  
*Bring the Joy Back to Reading* 34

## TEACHING THINKING

---

*Chapter 3* **DEBBIE MILLER**, EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT  
*Not So Gradual Release: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades* 46

*Chapter 4* **SAMANTHA BENNETT**, INSTRUCTIONAL COACH  
*Fulfilling the Promise of “All Students Can”: Comprehension Strategies as the Verbs of Learning Targets* 58

*Chapter 5* **LESLIE BLAUMAN**, CLASSROOM TEACHER, CHERRY HILLS VILLAGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
*Building a Better Book Club* 83

*Chapter 6* **CHRYSE HUTCHINS**, NATIONAL READING CONSULTANT  
*Thinking and Talking Our Way Through the Words* 98

## BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

---

*Chapter 7* **STEPHANIE HARVEY**, CONSULTANT AND AUTHOR  
*Comprehension to What End?* 111

*Chapter 8* **ANNE GOUDVIS** AND **BRAD BUHROW**, AUTHOR AND CONSULTANT; CLASSROOM TEACHER, COLUMBINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
*History Lessons* 128

*Chapter 9* **GINA CERVETTI**, UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, BOULDER  
*Comprehension in Science* **150**

*Chapter 10* **MARJORIE LARNER**, ASIA SOCIETY'S INTERNATIONAL STUDIES SCHOOLS  
 NETWORK  
*What High School Students Remember about Strategy  
 Instruction* **164**

## SEEKING EQUITY

---

*Chapter 11* **CRIS TOVANI**, TEACHER, OVERLAND HIGH SCHOOL  
*It's Not Too Late to Be Smart: The Hope and How of Secondary  
 Strategies Instruction* **174**

*Chapter 12* **NANCY COMMINS**, SENIOR INSTRUCTOR—CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTI-  
 CALLY DIVERSE EDUCATION, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN  
 DEVELOPMENT, UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, DENVER  
*Meaning Is Everything: Comprehension Work with English  
 Language Learners* **192**

*Chapter 13* **ANNE UPCZAK GARCIA**, TEACHER, COLUMBINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
*Comprehension Strategy Instruction for Culturally  
 and Linguistically Diverse Learners* **215**

*Chapter 14* **TANNY MCGREGOR**, STAFF DEVELOPER, WEST CLEREMONT SCHOOLS  
*Thinking Through the Day* **229**

## SYNTHESIZING

---

**P. DAVID PEARSON**, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY  
*Toward the Next Generation of Comprehension Instruction:  
 A Coda* **243**

*Annotated Bibliography* **255**

*Selected Publications by Contributing Authors* **269**

*Index* **273**



# Welcome and Introduction

**Harvey "Smokey" Daniels**

Harvey "Smokey" Daniels

Greetings, dear reader. I am going to introduce you to this very special book in just a moment. But right now, would you kindly read this passage?

**// Recommendation Engine //**

*Ask an Algorithm*

Which TV for Me?

**I want that Panasonic 103-inch TV. My wife says that's too big. Is she right?**

Optimal viewing distance at 1080p = diagonal screen size  $\div$  0.84; maximum OVD for 103-inch screen = 122.619 inches.

**Recommendation:** If seat to screen distance  $>122.619$  inches: Purchase TV; if  $<122.619$  inches: Construct home theater space of necessary size; purchase TV.

Now, let me try to read your mind:

A minute ago, you entered this passage with your normal reading confidence, but soon ran into a bit of difficulty. This bit of text does not cough up meaning so easily. Perhaps you noticed yourself immediately puzzling over the three headings, trying to figure out what genre of text you were about to read. Or maybe you scanned the passage and were daunted by all those goofy fonts and all that symbolic language ahead.

Because you were *monitoring your comprehension*, you could feel that your understanding might be in jeopardy, and so you started making specific mental moves to improve your chances. Probably, you stopped and reread parts of the passage, or slowed down your reading rate. You could feel your thinking become more conscious and intentional.

A lot of *questions* were popping into your head, like “What’s a Recommendation Engine?” “What does OVD mean?” “What kind of publication did this come from?” “Why can’t they give the measurements in feet instead of inches?” “Which one of those darn symbols means ‘more than’ and which one means ‘less than’?”

You tried to *make connections* between the text and your background knowledge, perhaps about TVs you have owned, certain mathematical operations, or classic spousal debates. Indeed, a huge component of your ability to make sense of this passage was your *schema* for today’s high tech gadgets; if you were recently at Best Buy shopping for a new flat-screen, you probably understood this passage better than if you are a housebound technophobe. You were also doing a lot of *inferring*, putting together clues in the text with your own background knowledge in order to gain understanding—“I bet that TV must be *really* expensive.”

Along the way, you were *visualizing*, trying to make a mental image of a living room with that huge TV in it. “How big would a 103-inch TV actually be?” Or perhaps you tried to do that math calculation in your mind—or even picked up a pen and worked it out on paper. All through the text, you were constantly trying to *determine importance*, to figure out what were the most crucial facts and what were insignificant details. Probably, you quickly decided that the specific brand of the TV was relatively unimportant and wouldn’t help you crack the meaning puzzle.

And for sure you were always trying to *synthesize*, to pull together all the information into a comprehensible whole, a gist or summary of the piece. Only when you fully synthesized all this thinking did you really “get it,” and truly comprehend the passage. You realized that this “advice column” from *Wired* magazine (Leckart 2010, 86) is strictly tongue-in-cheek. The husband gets the giant TV either way. The supposed guidance comes from “An Algorithm,” a robotic voice answering questions with faux-scientific wisdom. This is a piece of comedy text; maybe not a gut-busting guffaw, but at least a chuckle.

So how successful was I at reading your mind? If I had any success, it is only because I expected you to make the same mental moves that any veteran reader would in this situation. Skilled readers:

monitor their comprehension  
 visualize and make sensory images  
 draw inferences  
 connect to background knowledge  
 ask questions of the text  
 determine what’s important  
 synthesize and summarize

As you will find in this book, there are several ways of labeling and ordering these mental operations, but their existence—their centrality to the reading process—is certain.

In the early 1980s, P. David Pearson and his colleagues conducted the first wave of research studies that led to the identification of these cognitive strategies. Up to that time, reading research had concentrated—perhaps overmuch—on the behaviors of struggling or “dyslexic” readers. But by shifting the focus to the ways *effective* readers operated, Pearson and his colleagues and interpreters (many of whom are contributors to this book) paved the way to specific classroom practices that help students learn to read like skillful readers do (Pearson and Gallagher 1983; Pearson et al. 1992).

Still, even after joining in an experiment like the TV passage, some people still doubt the existence of their own internal cognitive repertoire. “Strategies, schmategies,” they scoff. “I just read.” It is true that we don’t notice ourselves deploying these tools too often. That’s because when we adults encounter the vast majority of our everyday text—the newspaper, memos from the principal, etc., we “just understand it.” The text clicks along, we get the meaning, no problem. But this process is not magic; it happens because, as seasoned reading “pros,” we have long since internalized a repertoire of thinking patterns, and we now mostly use them unconsciously and automatically. *But*, when the text is a little tougher (as this article was for us, and as school materials so often are for kids) we suddenly “hear our brain working” as we shift to more conscious, intentional strategies.

Sometimes people think they only use cognitive strategies with nonfiction, where a more purposeful and stepwise approach seems necessary. With fiction, the story goes, you can just lose yourself, and still gain robust meaning without using any particular strategies. But think of yourself sitting on a summer beach with the latest page-turning novel. Aren’t you making mental images of the characters and the setting? Connecting their travails to your own life experiences (She’s just like my

mother!)? Inferring from clues in the text to make predictions about what might happen next (These two are totally going to sleep together!)? And maybe even questioning the author's decisions (I can't believe the author killed off my favorite character halfway through the book!)?

Perhaps our comprehension strategies work especially quietly when we read a novel. Probably the elemental backbone of narrative allows our understanding of stories to happen deeper in the background. But still, the strategies are inarguably at work in the minds of all skilled readers, in all genres of text, all the time.

This is profound. What we have come to call *proficient reader strategies* are not a fad, not a program, and not the latest bandwagon rolling through Teacher Town. This model will not soon be displaced by the latest Silver Bullet Super Comprehension Software. Far from being transient gimmicks, these strategies describe the way skillful readers think in response to text, and probably always have.

But the essential question for us as educators is this: Knowing that these strategies are real and lie at the heart of reading, what do we do? What actions do we take with our preschoolers, our third graders, our middle and high school kids? How do we work with English language learners, kids with identified learning needs, and students who just (for one reason or another) struggle with learning to read or enjoying reading?

## The Purpose and Origins of This Book

This is precisely the range of issues that this book addresses. In these pages, sixteen distinguished authors show what comprehension instruction looks like when it is “done right”; what an amazing range of applications this paradigm can have for all students, across the curriculum; what problems have been encountered and solved (or not); and most importantly, what's left to achieve. As you'll see, each author takes the comprehension strategies as a starting point, and then reaches out toward a different set of applications, extensions, and practices. Many of these authors are “rethinking thinking,” modifying the model, and forging ahead. There's plenty of diversity here, different directions in pathfinding and problem solving. But everyone is also connected by the solid and growing research base on comprehension instruction and by our commitment to kids. Our common goal is to provide every child in America with an “All-Access Pass” to literacy.

Many of these contributors have been associated with Denver’s remarkable Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC), founded in 1983. The PEBC is quite a story in itself, emerging over the past twenty-five-plus years as one of the most focused and influential think tanks in the country—not just in recent years, but ever. The list of PEBC-affiliated educators reads like a “who’s who” of progressive reading instruction in America. Also among this book’s writers are multiple “generations”—at least two waves of comprehension leaders and pioneers. We hear from veterans who hail from the earliest days of the 1980s—and also enjoy the younger voices of next-generation reading leaders. For obvious reasons, I am not about to enumerate who hails from which era.

Among our contributors are four educators who work mainly as researchers, six current elementary and secondary teachers, and eight former teachers who now work as authors and consultants. Most contributors have written at least one book of their own; in the aggregate, these people have published more than fifty titles. (See a sampling on pages 267–72.) They’ve keynoted every major conference, research symposium, and state reading convention in the country. But perhaps most uniquely, every contributor to this book has taught kids in school or spent hundreds of hours observing great teachers at work. In fact, as far as I can tell, every one of us is working directly with kids *this year*—either full-time, part-time, doing demonstration lessons, or conducting classroom research.

## The Editor’s Welcome

I came into the comprehension world as a “friend of the family”—a follower, not a founder. My own work on literature circles, content-area literacy, inquiry learning, and small-group collaboration always had a latent awareness of reading-as-thinking (there’s a lot of unconscious stuff happening in this field, isn’t there?). So when P. David Pearson’s work appeared and was translated for me by Ellin Keene, Susan Zimmermann, Stephanie Harvey, Anne Goudvis, Debbie Miller, and Cris Tovani, I was rocked. The comprehension work revolutionized my own practice as a teacher, staff developer, and author. Over the past six or seven years, I’ve written several books that show my deep debt to the ideas and the people in this volume.

Still, I rather like my semioutsider status. Editing this project has been a happy way for me to testify to the power of this work and to help extend its growth. Because I value the insights that comprehension research has

offered me and the learners I serve, I have also been concerned about misapplications and distortions of the work. So a couple of years ago, out of both appreciation and concern, I got the notion of gathering some of my own (mostly unaware) mentors to talk about comprehension's future.

In the fall of 2009, we gathered in Denver for a daylong meeting. The goal was to look over the past, but mainly to think about the future of comprehension instruction—with an eye toward creating a book, if that felt right to everyone. Our meeting was a bit of a reunion as well, since many people who had once worked side by side in Colorado schools had now branched out across the nation, working as consultants with kids and schools in distant locales. As people entered the room, there were enthusiastic greetings, loud laughter, and two identical outfits (which we overcame after much amusement). It was remarkable to see not just the professionalism and the brilliance of these educators, but their warm community with each other. My buddy Brad Buhrow and I had to agree; there was a component of this connection we two might never be part of.

Once the conversation began, people expressed a mixture of satisfaction, pride, surprise, and concern about the extent to which comprehension strategy instruction had become a national movement. People shared success stories of amazing teachers and their high-achieving young readers around the country, of brave principals and districts who had committed to wide implementation of reading-as-thinking instruction. Others talked about problems encountered and sometimes overcome. We wrung our hands over stories of “strategies gone bad”—being taught for their own sake, rather than as tools for deeper thinking. We exchanged notes about recent articles and books that had really impressed us, and worried about the proliferation of shallow comprehension worksheets and lockstep programs (Monday we visualize, Tuesday we infer . . .). We were all trying to jot notes, contribute to the conversation, and listen at the same time. I had to forcibly remind people to eat something as meals appeared.

It was an exhilarating day. At the end, we decided, yes, let's do a book together about what state-of-the-art comprehension looks like—and how it might grow from here.

I've tried to edit this book so that it feels like the meeting in Denver—conversational, energetic, reflective, principled, forward-looking, and leavened with humor. To recreate that sense of lively interaction, the authors have offered comments on each others' chapters, which you'll find in the margins along the way. I've also pulled out the most striking quotes from each author's chapter, both to highlight the biggest of the big ideas



and just to savor what fine writers we have among us. Anne Goudvis has kindly collected everyone’s three favorite publications—just those very few recent books or articles that really knocked our socks off and advanced our thinking. I hope you enjoy all these features, as well as the rock-solid reasoning that I believe runs through all the chapters.

At a recent meeting of reading educators, Regie Routman pointed out that “we are all born into this world comprehending.” What a powerful reminder. As tiny babies, and even before birth, we are making meaning from everything we hear, feel, and see around us. Our whole lives unfold through our growing ability to make sense as we listen, view, and eventually read. There is no topic more important to human development—or to education—than learning how we humans come to understand.

—Harvey “Smokey” Daniels  
Santa Fe, NM

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# oward the Next Generation of Comprehension Instruction

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A Coda

**P. David Pearson**



My colleagues—the editors and authors of this diverse array of chapters—have written an important book about reading comprehension instruction, and at just the right time. It is important because it achieves two essential goals on behalf of all those professionals committed to comprehension as the core of reading instruction. First, it reasserts the fundamental, research-based principles that have guided responsible comprehension instruction for nearly three decades. Second, it responds, in both explicit and implicit ways, to the recent criticisms of comprehension instruction, especially instruction that helps students learn how to use comprehension and metacognitive strategies to understand otherwise puzzling text,

As important as these goals are, they are not the real genius of this book. Its real genius is that it is written by teachers, for teachers. All of the authors in this book know what classrooms are like—either because they teach in classrooms every day or because they spend a lot of time working with teachers in classrooms and in professional development settings. This means that authenticity and integrity pervade every chapter in

this book. Teachers will immediately sense this authenticity on their way to realizing that this book offers an endless supply of useful suggestions for creating comprehension inside classrooms.

## Achieving the Major Goals

### Research-Based Principles

In the spirit of honoring the importance of reading to learn, I will frame my synthesis of the research-based principles on which this book is based as an account of what I learned from reading the chapters in this important volume. I have organized them as a set of principles that I, being a focused and highly strategic reader, inferred from reading across all the chapters. I believe, and I hope, they are an appropriate summary (maybe even a synthesis) of the wonderful ideas in this text.

#### *Teaching Comprehension Is a Moral Enterprise*

Let's begin with the broadest and, I think, most important principle. Teachers don't enter into the kind of instruction privileged in this volume just so students can and will read better. They do it because they know that comprehension opens a world of opportunity—that the ability to make sense of text, to engage with the big ideas of literature, and to learn about how the world around them works makes it possible for students to live a good life, a life in which reading is a never-ending source of learning, enjoyment, and reflection. We may not think about it every day when we enter the classroom, but it really is true that we teach comprehension to create a competitive workforce for the global economy, to promote a literate citizenry worthy of our democracy, and to guarantee that each student we have the privilege of serving has the tools to live an “examined” life. It is useful sometimes to step back and ask ourselves why we do what we do. The authors of this book invite us to do just that. Actually a few of them—including Zimmermann, Upzack Garcia, and Commins—*insist* we do just that.

#### *Comprehension Instruction Begins and Ends in the Hearts and Minds of Students*

We've known about the impact of knowledge on comprehension for several decades; that was the fundamental message we learned from schema theory in the 1970s. And many of the authors of this volume have published eloquent accounts, both in this volume and in previous works, of how we can

use knowledge to promote comprehension. What has changed in the last few years is that we are much more aware of the complementary idea that knowledge is as much a consequence as it is a cause of comprehension: Knowledge begets comprehension begets knowledge begets comprehension. . . . This is the kind of virtuous cycle we would like to promote in schools instead of the vicious cycle we are all too well aware of—the one in which reading failure prompts reading avoidance prompts failure, and so on. Put differently, we can and should say that good comprehension instruction puts the interests, needs, and knowledge resources of students at the heart of comprehension instruction. In her chapter, Marjorie Larner truly enacts this principle when she directly asks students themselves how comprehension instruction has affected them as learners.

### *Reading to Learn Is Always a Part of Learning to Read*<sup>1</sup>

They don't always say so out loud (as Gina Cervetti, Anne Goudvis, and Brad Buhrow do), but one of the goals that the authors of this volume share with me is to do everything possible to downplay the commonly expressed distinction between learning to read and reading to learn. I have tired of hearing the phrase that in grades 1–3, kids learn to read, and after that they read to learn (Pearson and Cervetti in press). The authors of this volume reject that idea, either explicitly or implicitly. In its place they champion the idea that learning from reading should be part of the reading equation from the outset of kindergarten and first grade. Kids should always be reading content that is worth knowing. They should encounter ideas that promote the acquisition of knowledge, insight, human understanding, and joy. Even though this book is more about reading than writing, I would add (and I think that all the authors would agree) that students should also be writing about things that matter, about those very understandings, insights, and moments of joy. Then and only then will they learn that reading and writing are tools for learning—a message some of our commercial curricula seem hard-pressed to promote.

If we want to promote this idea that reading to learn is always a part of learning to read, we need to really emphasize the tool metaphor—that reading and writing (and I would add language, especially what we have

<sup>1</sup> These ideas first appeared in a revision of my own perspective on the Radical Middle that I wrote for the second edition of Rona Flippo's book *Reading Researchers in Search of Common Ground* (in press). They appear here with the permission of the author and the editor.

TABLE 1: LANGUAGE PROCESSES AS LEARNING TOOLS					
Learning Tools		DISCIPLINES			
		Literature	Science	Social Studies	Mathematics
	Reading	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Writing	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Language	✓	✓	✓	✓

come to call *academic language*) are tools for learning. And they are best put to service in acquiring knowledge and inquiry skills in disciplines like science, social studies, mathematics, and literature. As a vivid example of this principle, in her chapter, Tanny McGregor talks about extending the use of the thinking tools of language throughout the school day. By the way, I think it is better to think of literature (not language arts but literature) as a discipline on a par with the subject areas of schooling.<sup>2</sup> Then the process parts of the language arts (reading, writing, and language) are released from the sole grasp of literature and are available for all the disciplines. Think of it as a matrix with disciplines across the top and tools for learning down the side, as depicted in Table 1.

Were we to take such a matrix seriously, we would have very different basal reading programs than those currently on the market because the distribution of disciplines and genres would be much broader in scope than is currently the case. This broader scope would have the side benefit of broadening the appeal of basal content to a wider range of learners than is possible with the literature-centric basal programs in today’s market. But what is really important about this reconceptualization is that it means that the acquisition of knowledge, understanding, insight, and (yes) joy would always provide a context for honing our language-based learning tools. Wouldn’t that be a great expectation to hold—that when we learn new ideas, we improve our language skills!

<sup>2</sup> I agree with those who argue that the subject matter of literature is the human experience itself—life and death, love and hate, friendship and betrayal, harmonizing with or harnessing the natural environment, and so on.

*Comprehension Is as Dependent on Affect as It Is on Cognition*

There is no denying the importance of cognitive activity and outcomes in the comprehension process. I just said as much in acknowledging the importance of knowledge. And I have spent most of my career championing cognitive connections between the texts kids read and the background knowledge they bring to the classroom. But we have not (or at least I have not) always paid as much attention to the affective side of understanding as we (I) might, focusing more on the ideas that students gain from reading rather than on feelings or motives.

In nearly every chapter in this volume my fellow authors encourage us to broaden our view of comprehension, to worry as much about the *will* and *thrill* of reading as about the *skill*. This perspective comes packaged in many forms, each with different terms. In the chapters that emphasize literature, including those by Leslie Blauman and Chryse Hutchins, we are reminded that encouraging aesthetic responses to literature is core to the literary experience (my preference has always been to deal with aesthetic response before more everyday comprehension responses so as to encourage personal responses while they are still fresh in students' recollections). We are also reminded that even when students read the informational texts of social studies and science, they can—if teachers ground the experience in “hands-on” science or “minds-on” social studies—promote a high degree of engagement. Reading about how the natural or social world works need not, should not, be *boring* (to borrow from the most popular of adolescent terms to describe school!). Finding ways to connect these texts to students' lives is one way of achieving engagement, as is providing choice. Not everyone has to read the same text about gravity or the War of 1812; it makes for interesting discussions, in fact, when students bring different perspectives and knowledge sources to the table. Students can even choose the ways in which they want to demonstrate their understanding; Susie can answer some constructed response questions, Miguel can write an essay, and Darien can make a PowerPoint presentation about the very same text. And each form of response represents an opportunity to assess student comprehension.

*Scaffolding Is the Central Instructional Metaphor in Guiding Students Along the Path of Independence*

When Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) coined the scaffolding metaphor as a way of describing what expert tutors do to promote problem solving among students, they could not have possibly imagined how popular the term



would become as a way for educators to describe the pedagogical journey from teacher-dependent to completely independent learning on the part of students.

The instant I read Wood et al.'s account when it appeared in the mid 1970s, I was smitten. It captured exactly what I was trying, albeit clumsily, to communicate to teachers about the genius of instruction. I soon incorporated the term into my teacher lexicon—along with prior knowledge, comprehension strategy, inference, and metacognition—as terms to describe the basics of comprehension instruction. It was the core concept behind another popular metaphor, *the gradual release of responsibility* (hereafter GRR), that Meg Gallagher and I coined in 1983 to describe the genius of the work that Joe Campione and Ann Brown were doing with learning-disabled students at the Center for the Study of Reading.

What was, and is, so compelling about the scaffolding metaphor is that it captures most of the important insights we have developed about good pedagogy. Here are my top four insights.

1. ***We reduce the amount of scaffolding across time (and lessons) as students develop greater independent control in applying any strategy, skill, or practice we want them to use with regularity.*** This is the most common and obvious of insights about scaffolding, the very core of the GRR framework. But it does *not* mean, as many infer, that we always begin a sequence with modeling, then moving to guided practice, and finally independent practice. We could begin a sequence by asking students to “try it on their own,” offering feedback and assistance as students demonstrate the need for it. James Baumann, an instructional researcher who has made significant contributions to comprehension research, once asked me in a conference session on strategy instruction, “David, how much explicit instruction should a teacher provide?” My response: “As little as possible.” And I meant it sincerely. There is no inherent virtue in explicit instruction and modeling. We offer if and when students demonstrate less than completely independent control over an activity; and we provide just enough scaffolding so that students can perform the activity successfully. It is a “Goldilocks” phenomenon—not too much, not too little, but *just the right amount*.
2. ***We vary the amount of scaffolding offered within any given lesson as students demonstrate the capacity to control the strategy, skill, or practice.*** It is extremely powerful for a group of students,

within the context of a single lesson, to demonstrate to themselves that they can do more on their own by the end of a lesson than they could at the beginning.

3. ***We can and should vary scaffolding between students within a single lesson.*** Part of the genius of the gradual release of responsibility framework is that it applies in so many situations. We have already suggested that we can vary the scaffolding provided to students across lessons and across time within a lesson. But we can also differentiate the nature and amount of scaffolding across students within a given lesson. For example, in a discussion about a story or an informational text, one student may benefit from a clue about what page to look at to find information relevant to answering a question, a second may be helped by restating the question in different words, and a third by turning an open-ended (Why did Henry take Jake's backpack?) into a forced choice question (Did Henry take Jake's backpack for revenge or money?).
4. ***We are prepared to revert to greater (or lesser) scaffolding as text and task demands create varying scaffolding needs.*** This, for me, is the most powerful and important insight about scaffolding. If we accept the general notion that reading comprehension represents an interaction between a reader, a text, and a "task" within a socio-cultural context (RAND Reading Study Group 2002), then we must accept the idea that our comprehension "ability" varies with the text and task. And the path to progress is not always a straight line: Show me a reader who is a master comprehender today, and I'll show you one who isn't tomorrow. All I have to do is to up the ante on the complexity of the text, the obscurity of its topic, or the cognitive demand of the comprehension task. As teachers, we must always be prepared to revert to greater scaffolding when one of these elements (text, topic, or task) creates greater demands on readers. Just as surely, we must be prepared to withdraw that scaffolding when these "stars" of comprehension are more positively aligned. It is this insight that I had in mind when I responded to Baumann's query with the "as little as possible" explicit instruction answer. And this is precisely what Debbie Miller has in mind when she admonishes us to release responsibility a little faster than we have in the past.

## Responding to the Critics of Strategy Instruction

In some ways, it is clear that an underlying purpose of this book is to respond to the criticisms that have been leveled at comprehension instruction, particularly strategy instruction, over the last several years. Keene, in the opening chapter, lays out a compelling account of all the things we have learned because we have been engaged in strategy instruction as a profession for the past thirty years. And there is an assumption, in most of the chapters, that others in the profession are questioning some of the basic assumptions about strategy instruction. The response is effective, I believe, because the authors of the chapters in this book realize what I also know to be true—that the critiques offered of strategy instruction are often a critique not of thoughtfully designed and executed strategy instruction, but of some hypothetical caricature of strategy instruction. So my fellow authors have redoubled their efforts to lay out first principles to guide our efforts, along with compelling examples of what good strategy instruction should look like. I think they have accomplished that goal. This book is justified on these grounds alone.

In my personal view, the fundamental reason why strategy instruction has been vulnerable to critique is that when it gets implemented in commercial reading programs (which is surely the site of its most widespread implementation), the dynamic, adaptive, and responsive character it has in the hands of the authors of the chapters in this volume is replaced by rigidity and inflexibility. Even worse, if and when it becomes the object of assessment (as is highly likely in our current hyper-accountability context) it is likely to become even more set in stone. Risking the label of a troglodyte, I would remind readers that when I wrote about comprehension strategies with Roehler, Dole, and Duffy (1992), we cautioned teachers that (a) good reading strategies are as adaptable as they are intentional and (b) good strategy instruction is as adaptable as it is intentional. Both reading strategies and the instruction we offer to support them cannot survive in an environment that requires strict adherence to accountability demands.

So I would argue (indeed I have quite recently [Pearson in press]) that strategy instruction, especially in the ways in which it has been put into practice in the modern curriculum (e.g., basals and kits), stands in need of reform. It may not be as effective as conventional discussions that, in one

way or another, focus on knowledge acquisition (McKeown, Beck, and Blake 2009; Wilkinson and Son 2011). And it may breed an excessive reliance on abstract, content-free, metacognitive introspection about strategy use (Pearson and Fielding 1991).

When strategy instruction becomes too generic and abstract, too “isolated” from the goal of acquiring knowledge and insight, it is in danger of becoming an end unto itself—what Pearson and Fielding (1991) speculated might become “introspective nightmares.” We get these nightmares when the enactment of the strategy becomes more complicated than the ideas that the strategies were supposed to help students acquire. I am not arguing that we should throw out all forms of strategy instruction. To the contrary, I remain committed to high-quality strategy instruction, instruction that demonstrates the purpose and utility (what they buy you in terms of learning goals) of strategies at every step along the way. Put differently, I endorse the dynamic, adaptable, thoughtful model of strategy instruction put forward in the chapters of this book. So I am completely on board with Ellin Keene’s conceptualization of the outcomes and dimensions of understanding or Debbie Miller’s advice to move more rapidly toward independence, Cris Tovani’s notion of a tool kit for getting yourself unstuck, and Samantha Bennett’s integration of comprehension instruction with planning and assessment. These fellow authors convey precisely the approach to strategy instruction we must take to compensate for the more “compliant” enactments we find in some of the commercial attempts to promote strategies, especially those that couple it with standards and assessments for strategy use.

To ensure that strategy instruction gets off to a good start, students must acquire “insider” knowledge about why and how we use strategies, as Ellin Keene and Cris Tovani (among others) have always contended. And they benefit greatly from the instant feedback demonstrating to them that strategies are useful—that pulling out just the right tool to help you over a hurdle at just the right moment makes you a smarter, more effective, and more strategic reader.

In a sense, strategies suffer from the same rap as phonics rules. Ideally they are only a means to an end. It’s when phonics rules or strategies become their own goals that the system self-destructs. In such circumstances, both teachers and students are more likely to engage in mock compliance. Thus the strategies get put into a special “school talk” box that is hauled out only when the assignment requires it and then put back on a shelf well out of

reach for everyday reading. The only way to block mock compliance is to provide guided apprenticeships that help students learn how, when, and why to apply strategies so that they can see their transparent benefit.

## A Final Plea

I close this coda with a plea to all readers of this wonderful book on reading comprehension. And the plea is simple: Don't get too enamored with comprehension as the sole solution to all the problems of modern reading instruction. Comprehension instruction can make the critical difference in student engagement and achievement, but only if it gets enacted in an ecologically balanced instructional program, one that ensures that students get a fair shot at a lot of other reading and language skills and understandings. Writing in 2002, Nell Duke and I argued that comprehension instruction, especially ambitious strategy instruction (which we fully embraced and championed), could only be nurtured in a pedagogical surround that paid adequate attention to phonics and word recognition, vocabulary, rich discussions of text, sound writing instruction, opportunities for students to read a wide range of texts and genres independently, high-quality assessment, and motivation and engagement. To that list, writing from today's perspective, I would echo my colleagues Stephanie Harvey, Anne Goudvis, Brad Buhrow, and Gina Cervetti in keeping knowledge acquisition high on one's pedagogical agenda. I know that the authors of this volume share this view of ecological balance. I encourage all those who read this volume to embrace such a view. If and when you do, you'll find that your comprehension curriculum will be more powerful and more fruitful than ever. Happy teaching—and learning.

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